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**Conference Report: CASA Advocacy Week, November 25-30, 2018, Ottawa, Ontario**

**What is CASA Advocacy Week?**

Every year, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations holds an advocacy week. Member and observer associations alike are invited to participate in advocacy meetings with elected officials, senators, and stakeholders in the nation's capital.

**November 25, 2018**

We woke up very early and headed to the Lethbridge airport at about 4:00am. After three flights and four different airports, we finally arrived in Ottawa. Upon arrival, we joined in on the conference activities. This included a policy and fact review for advocacy week. This was really important as it ensured all students and staff members were comfortable with the research and asks on which we were advocating.

**November 26, 2018**

Our first session of the day was entitled "Parliament Hill 101". A professional government relations firm came in to talk to us about advocacy best practices on the Hill. It was really informative, and helpful to get a refresher on some of the nation's politics before beginning advocacy meetings the next day. Next, we had a very valuable session entitled "Empowering You to Handle Difficult Situations". Unfortunately, more often than one would expect, one runs into difficult situations during advocacy meetings. It can be challenging to present these asks to important people in our country, and so this reminder about navigating through tough times was greatly appreciated. Then, we moved on to a fun interactive session. Returning student and staff acted out advocacy meetings for the rest of us, and presented comical skits of what not to do in an advocacy meeting. The rest of us were tasked with identifying the errors, and it was an engaging teaching method. Our last session of the day ran for a few hours. Essentially, we were split into groups so that we could practice advocacy meetings. To my shock, I was put in a French group. It was a challenge to try to advocate in French, but it was a worthwhile exercise, and I was excited to try it out. It also provided me

with an opportunity to speak more to our colleagues in the Quebec Students' Union, which was awesome.

**November 27th, 2018**

This was our first full day of advocacy meetings! We started with a breakfast session going over some quick reminders, and then we were off. I had a few meetings throughout the day. My first meeting was with MP Martin Shields. MP Shields represents the riding of Bow River in Ottawa. Next, I had a meeting with MP Pat Kelly, who represents the Calgary Rocky Ridge riding. My last meeting of the day was with MP Rachel Harder, our local MP in Lethbridge. All three of my discussions went very well. This evening, we had a reception at Centre Block for all of the conference attendees, plus stakeholders, MPs, and senators were invited. This was a great way to celebrate our advocacy work, and it was amazing to have the opportunity to attend such an event in Centre Block.

**November 28th, 2018**

We started the day with a debrief session based on what had happened the day before. I had a few meetings during the day: MP Sean Fraser, MP Francesco Sorbara, and MP David Yurdiga. In the afternoon, we were able to attend a session with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). The MHCC is currently developing a standard for post-secondary institutions to meet regarding mental health supports on campuses. As such, the MHCC was looking to engage with students about what we would like to see. It was a really fruitful discussion and I look forward to reading this standard when it is finished. At the end of the day, we were able to get together with our CASA committees to make plans for the last four months of our terms. After, we had a CAUS meeting.

**November 29th, 2018**

I had two meetings during the day: MP Wayne Stetski, and MP Dave Van Kesteren. Both meetings went very well. I also called in to a call for a committee I am on here at home, the Chancellor Search Committee. At the end of the day, we had a final debrief.

**November 30th, 2018**

The morning consisted of updates from the board members. It was a good opportunity to learn where each committee is at across the board, and to see what has been accomplished thus far. After lunch, I called in to another committee I'm on here at home: Dean of Health

Sciences Search Committee. With that, the conference was over. It was a great week and we accomplished a lot for students.

**December 1st/2nd, 2018**

Victoria and I had a TIME trying to get back to Lethbridge. After flying for twelve hours, we boarded the plane to Lethbridge only to have them fly us right back to Calgary. We ended up needing to spend the night in Calgary. It took us three tries on the Sunday morning, but we finally made it back home.

Thank you for reading, and as always, feel free to contact me with any questions.

All the best,

Laura Bryan